

**GOVERNOR KATHLEEN BABINEAUX BLANCO**  
**2006 LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**  
**June 19, 2006**

*Our challenge is to rebuild the affected areas while making progress as a state. Some will say that focusing on long-term goals during a time of urgent need is in conflict with our recovery. I say it is in concert. We can bring our communities back in a way that increases opportunities for all citizens of this state.” - Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco.*

**SUPPORTING PUBLIC EDUCATION**

*“A strong recovery demands a strong education system. It is our best weapon to fight the poverty exposed by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.” -Gov. Blanco*

Louisiana still ranks among the lowest among the Southern Regional Education Board member states in teacher pay. The 2006 pay raise for certificated teachers gets us one step closer in our quest to compete for quality teachers.

The storms hit our higher education and research community hard. These educators and researchers are vital to our efforts to create a thriving economy. There has not been a general faculty pay raise since 2001. Our talented professors are being recruited by other states and we must not tolerate any acts of intellectual looting from Louisiana.

Louisiana must continue to elevate the protection and education of our children as a top state priority and fund the programs that will achieve educational excellence.

**HB 1** includes:

- \$1,500 per year pay raise for certificated teachers
- \$500 per year support worker pay raise
- An approximate 5% pay increase for higher education faculty
- Statewide, a total of \$75.5 million is budgeted in three state agencies for Louisiana’s nationally acclaimed LA4 Pre-K Program for at-risk four year olds
- \$4.1 million for stipends for 828 nationally certified teachers (\$700,000 8(g) award from the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) for this program)
- \$950,000 for “Jobs for Louisiana Graduates,” a drop-out prevention program and major component in the High School Redesign Initiative
- \$2 million for a pilot program to keep our high school juniors and seniors in school while preparing them for the workforce or continuing their education. This dual enrollment program will allow approximately 6,700 high school juniors and seniors to enroll in technical and college courses to earn college credit while finishing high school.

## PAVING THE ROAD HOME

*“There is no greater challenge facing Louisiana’s recovery process than rebuilding the communities in the affected region and getting our people back home.”-Gov. Blanco*

The Louisiana Legislature approved Governor Blanco’s plans for investing federal Supplemental Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds in rebuilding homes and communities.

**SCR 63** approves *The Road Home* Housing Program designed to help homeowners rebuild and to make rental housing available and affordable to our critical workforce as it returns. The resolution specifically approves the allocation of \$8.08 billion of Supplemental CDBG funds and approximately \$1.05 billion of Hazard Mitigation funds to *The Road Home*. To fully fund *The Road Home* at those levels, Governor Blanco urged, Congress passed and President Bush signed the appropriation of an additional \$4.2 billion of CDBG funding dedicated to housing redevelopment.

*The Road Home* Housing Program ensures that:

- Neighborhoods are rebuilt in accordance with locally driven plans that emphasize safety and reduce risks in rebuilding;
- Homes are rebuilt using safer and smarter construction methods that meet the state uniform construction code and FEMA advisory base flood elevations;
- Neighborhoods are rebuilt in a manner that promotes mixed use and mixed income communities; and
- Housing opportunities are provided for households with special needs such as the elderly and people with disabilities.

To promote the rebuilding of whole communities impacted by the hurricanes, the Louisiana Legislature also approved a proposal by Governor Blanco to make an initial investment of Supplemental CDBG funds in vital infrastructure needs. **SCR 19** approves the spending of \$142.5 million on repairing and replacing state buildings and \$95 million on local emergency infrastructure needs.

**SB 445** creates the not-for-profit Louisiana Road Home Corporation to acquire and dispose of properties under *The Road Home* Housing Program. The Corporation allows for protection of the state from potential environmental issues associated with the acquisition of property. This Corporation will be subject to public records laws, open meetings laws and ethics code.

**The Louisiana Housing Preservation Act (ACT 355)** will assist municipalities in redeveloping their communities in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The receivership process creates a partnership between property owners and local governments to rehabilitate residential property without impacting ownership.

Local governments are responsible for identifying property that is below minimum livable standards, blighted or abandoned. Owners can also voluntarily place their property in receivership and participate in the redevelopment process.

Owners are returned control and possession of the property at the end of the receivership term and they can petition for reinstatement of control and possession at any time during the term.

## STREAMLINING LOCAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT

*“Streamlining New Orleans government will make it more efficient and accountable to the people. What works for the rest of the state will work for New Orleans. Our goal is not to rebuild the same. Our goal is to rebuild better than before.”-Gov. Blanco*

We right-sized Orleans parish government – including a court consolidation effort and a consolidation of the inefficient and previously entrenched seven assessor system. The NEW New Orleans demands a NEW government: leaner, smarter, better.

Consolidation included:

- **SB 647 and SB 141** provide the voters of Orleans Parish the opportunity to consolidate seven assessor offices into one like the rest of the state’s parishes
- **SB 645** provides for the following:
  - Creates a single district court for Orleans Parish
  - Establishes one sheriff for the parish of Orleans
  - Creates a single Clerk of Court for Orleans Parish
  - Merges the powers, duties and functions of the office of Recorder of Mortgages, Register of Conveyances and Custodian of Notarial Records for the Parish of Orleans with the single Clerk of Court office for the Parish of Orleans and abolishes the offices effective Jan. 1, 2009.

## CARING FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT

*“Our children deserve a future that is free of the dangerous effects of harmful products and polluted oilfield sites.”-Gov. Blanco*

**Act 312** restores the balance needed between economic development and the environment. Legacy lawsuits have disrupted the balance, stalling oil and gas exploration, creating an uncertain business climate, and leaving old oil and gas sites damaged. This legislation encourages consistent environmental clean-up standards and mandates court oversight of the clean-up to ensure the environmental damages are completely addressed. Businesses operating in the state will have greater certainty regarding potential liability for environmental damage. This law will provide for an effective balance between economic development, property rights and environmental quality.

**The Mercury Risk Reduction Act (ACT 126)** will reduce environmental mercury by encouraging the establishment of effective state and local waste reduction, recycling, and management programs:

- Manufacturers of mercury products must notify DEQ of a product’s distribution, properly label products and establish a collection system for products containing mercury.
- Certain mercury products are banned and improper disposal of waste-containing mercury is banned.

We invested in “clean” energy sources by enacting an ethanol bill (**ACT 313**). We did this to benefit our farmers and make us a leader in energy innovation. Louisiana will be at the forefront of not only the oil industry, but also the emerging industry of alternative fuels.

## ENERGIZING OUR WORKFORCE AND EMPOWERING BUSINESS GROWTH

*“The future revitalization of Louisiana businesses post hurricanes demands a vibrant, trained and educated workforce more than ever before.”-Gov. Blanco*

**HB 1** provides funding to enhance economic development progress:

- \$6 million to establish the Economic Development Matching Grant program
- \$4.57 million for land acquisition and site planning for a Megasite (funded in Capital Outlay budget)
- \$10 million to continue the Rapid Response Fund
- \$15 million for the development of our construction workforce
- \$750,000 for the Microenterprise Initiative, in the Department of Social Services, to help citizens become economically self-sufficient.

**SB 292 and HB 870** provide businesses the option of using an expedited DEQ permitting process. This attractive economic development provision for businesses can get new projects or repairs started quickly. All legally mandated public notice and comment requirements will remain in place.

The Louisiana Legislature approved Governor Blanco’s initial spending plans for federal Supplemental Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds through **SCR 19**, plans which include \$95 million for the Louisiana Bridge Loan Program to assist businesses recovering from the hurricanes.

## HEALING OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

*“All eyes are upon us in Louisiana with health care being of paramount importance.”-Gov. Blanco*

**HB 1** provides funding for health care services:

- \$10.3 million for 114 psychiatric beds at New Orleans Adolescent Hospital, Southeast Louisiana State Hospital and Villa Medical Complex to meet the demand for mental health services especially in the New Orleans area (in addition to \$80 million in Social Services Block Grant funds to address the state’s post-hurricane behavioral health issues)
- \$139 million (total funds) uncompensated care pool to help reimburse private and public community hospitals that provide care for uninsured patients...first time significant funding has been provided to community hospitals in a decade.
- \$38 million (total funds) for an increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates for hospital inpatient and out patient services
- \$2.9 million for behavioral health services in school-based health clinics
- \$15.3 million (total funds) to help rural hospitals
- \$48.9 million (total funds) for 200 New Opportunity Waiver (NOW) slots, 100 Elderly and Disabled Waiver (EDA) slots, the Family Planning Waiver and the Supports Waiver to expand non-institutional long term care services
- Funding for 156 beds and the trauma unit for LSU Health Sciences Center in New Orleans to provide care for the uninsured and provided funds to meet the increased demand at the other state hospitals
- Converted savings from lower generic pricing (AMP) to an increased dispensing fee for pharmacists filling Medicaid prescriptions
- Provided \$29 million (total funds) to increase Physician’s Medicaid rate to encourage more doctors to serve Medicaid patients.

**Act 465** creates the office for aging services within DHH to coordinate and deliver long term care services to the elderly and individuals with adult on-set disabilities as part of ongoing reforms to the state's long term care system. This effort was strongly supported by AARP, ARC of Louisiana, Developmental Disabilities Council and LACAN of Louisiana.

**Act 350** provides a plan for establishing regional human service districts across the state to empower local communities to govern the delivery of health care services. This bill will transfer the provision of public healthcare dollars into the hands of local governing boards.

We converted Metropolitan Developmental Center from providing institutional-based long term care to a home and community-based coordinating role. The residents served at Metropolitan have been provided waiver services or transferred to one of the state's other facilities per the wishes of the resident.

**HCR 127** formalizes the Louisiana Health Care Redesign Collaborative that has been meeting for the last three months to provide input on a waiver Governor Blanco will submit to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services this fall.

- A report from Pricewaterhouse Coopers has been received and endorsed by the LRA as a long term vision for change. The Collaborative will put the road map together detailing how such reforms can actually and successfully be implemented.
- This redesign is different in that it will represent a radical departure from what was known as the health care system in the New Orleans region. The waiver envisions a system that coordinates services from home to doctor's office to hospital, to long term care and hospice. We need to emphasize care that is preventive in nature, accessible and which provides appropriate services no matter what the source of funding.
- Once Louisiana receives the flexibility needed with Medicaid, the rest of the state will be in line to enjoy the same opportunity to redesign their systems to meet localized needs. This will signal true reform.

## **ADVANCING LOUISIANA'S EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

*"Louisiana is writing the book on lessons learned from a catastrophe. I insist on accountability. We must adopt bold reforms if we are to correct deficiencies in our emergency management system and give responders the tools they need to save lives."-Gov. Blanco*

In the summer of 2005, Louisiana suffered the devastating effects of the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States.

Governor Blanco's 2006 package included legislation providing the statutory authority necessary for a more efficient and effective response during future disasters and to improve governmental efficiencies post-disaster.

**Act 442** strengthens the Governor's Office of Homeland Security - insuring consistent statewide protocol and establishes a regional planning model to enhance local emergency preparedness efforts.

This Act complements Executive Order 2006-17 issued by Governor Blanco on March 31, 2006 that creates the Statewide Interoperable Communication System Executive Committee to design, construct, administer, and maintain a statewide shared communication system with capacity to transport voice, data, and imagery within the system.

**SB 529** provides for the safe evacuation of nursing home patients. This legislation ensures that the evacuation plans of nursing homes are viable and effective in safely moving our most fragile citizens. Additionally, we provide a process for engaging local, state and federal assets in the event of a disaster.

We all know it is the primary responsibility of nursing homes to safely evacuate their patients. They are paid to care for them in rain or shine. However, it is everyone's responsibility to work tirelessly to ensure that the problems and tragic stories of last year never happen again.

Other bills that will enhance the state's emergency response:

- **HB 1** includes \$3.5 million for implementation of the Louisiana Emergency Response Network, a statewide system that will significantly enhance delivery of emergency and trauma care for patients during disasters.
- **Acts 207 and 317** provide for temporary credentialing of out-of-state health care and law enforcement professionals to ensure an efficient process for utilizing volunteer emergency responders.
- **Acts 258 and 192** provide a change in the time period (from five to two years) when one is absent, no body found, as a result of a disaster before family can have a person declared deceased. This legislation provides families of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita victims with emotional and legal closure.
- **Act 93** incorporates into law the provisions of a gubernatorial executive order regarding the temporary housing of displaced inmates during an emergency.
- **Act 399** adjusts the powers of the Secretary of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries during emergencies to alter or close hunting seasons.